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The inevitable confrontation at Columbia University during the Spring of 1968 was instigated by a small group of student extremists whose objectives were to destroy the university. These students gave some legitimacy to their activities by associating themselves with other students to exploit basic issues of widespread concern the war in Vietnam, the selective service system, and racism in the US. The black students had their own genuine issues and were essentially uninfluenced by the white extremists, although the activities of both groups eventually converged. The dilemma faced by the university was either to capitulate or to use force. The situation was further complicated by faculty grievances and local criticisms of the university's relationship with its surrounding community. The Columbia experience may have been different if responsible, effective communications existed within the university to compete with the unreliable student press and local media, thus making it difficult for a small minority to exploit the uninformed majority. Also, a body of faculty members representing several of the university's schools --and not several self-constituted faculty groups-- should have constituted the mechanism for decision making. Campus disorders may continue, but only the legitimate faculty bodies can decide to resolve differences by means of civility and reason, on which the survival of the university rests. (WM)

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David B. Truman

THE DILEMMAS OF AN UNAVOIDABLE CONFRONTATION

It would serve no useful purpose today for me to attempt a narrative of the events at Columbia last spring. The available time would not permit such an effort, especially since it would require correcting the misreports in the many, and increasing, accounts of the events. None of these can be fully relied upon. Some are outrageously fictional; others indiscriminately substitute polemics for analysis. The recent report of the Cox Commission, although the narrative is reasonably complete, is so shockingly *ex parte* in its handling of some aspects of the story and so credulous in its treatment of evidence at a number of points that many of its interpretations are of the most doubtful validity.

But the particulars of the Columbia experience should be of little concern to a group such as this. Of greater interest to you, I should assume, are the inferences from these events that presumably can have some relevance to other settings and other circumstances. Even these are numerous, and I shall not attempt to deal with more than a few.

The inferences that I draw from the Columbia situation in part reflect a conception of the underlying and conditioning circumstances. In fairness, therefore, I should outline this conception.

In particular, I should indicate what I do and what I do not mean when I refer to the confrontation at Columbia as "unavoidable." I do not mean that there were no possible tactical steps that might have been taken to avoid the occurrence of the events when and as they happened. Any Monday-morning quarterback should be able to devise such means of avoidance. Nor do I mean to imply that we were faced with a carefully laid conspira-

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torial plan, complete in strategy and timing. The Columbia events were more like a happening, one of a series of continual probing operations that almost accidentally developed into a genuine confrontation. What I do mean is that we were dealing with a group, a relatively small group, whose objectives were such that sooner or later it was almost certain that a confrontation would occur. McGeorge Bundy accurately characterizes them, though without special reference to Columbia, as "a group which would rather destroy the university than reshape it for peaceful progress." He adds, ". . . this small group has reached a conscious and carefully calculated decision that its object must be to discredit the present management of universities *by means whose only test is whether they work to this specific end.*" (Emphasis added.) An important implication of this statement, one that can too readily be missed, is that the attacks by this small group, no matter how personalized, are not in fact primarily attacks on individuals. They are, and are intended to be, assaults on positions and on the institution itself.

With such a group an appeal to reason is futile. The modes of discussion and action congenial to a university are simply irrelevant to their purposes. With skill and good fortune, conflict can be postponed, chiefly by isolating the group and keeping it in a clear minority position on the campus.

At Columbia, during the months preceding the April outbreak, accident and a degree of tactical skill on the part of the dissident group combined to add significant support to this minority's position. The actual numbers in the extremist group were not augmented, but they did succeed in building bridges to the center that served to reduce their isolation, to blur the destructiveness of their objectives, and to give a certain legitimacy to their activities. These were in no sense alliances. The extremist group rather joined other students in exploiting issues of widespread concern and thus succeeded, whether intentionally or not, in associating themselves with sentiments that pretty clearly were majority sentiments. These were, of course, opposition to the war in Vietnam, resentment toward the Selective Service System, particularly the revised draft requirements, and among white students a somewhat less obvious sense of racial guilt that was accentuated by the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. By espousing these sentiments and by acting on them, the extremists achieved a certain acceptance, even when their tactics were viewed with disapproval. (Anyone who recalls the Joseph McCarthy period will recognize that combination of circumstances.)

These bridges did not extend, in any significant measure, to the black students, who played a crucial but essentially separate role in the disturbances. Their problems, like those of their counterparts on other predominantly white campuses, were at base genuine and difficult, however

inappropriate their actions. The efforts of the black students converged with those of the white extremists, but the blacks were essentially uninfluenced by the activities of the white radical group, certainly in comparison with the white students toward the center of the spectrum.

Contributing to the basic situation were a considerable number of what I might call local grievances, though many of their precise equivalents can be found on any campus today. These included resentment toward the practices and omissions of individual members of the faculty and objections to the way in which some departments were being run. Many of these grievances were real, as they are on other campuses. More strictly local were a series of criticisms of the University's relations with the surrounding neighborhood, chiefly with the community on Morningside Heights, where the accomplished and projected expansion of the University inevitably created tensions, but to some extent with the black community in Harlem, symbolized by the proposed Columbia-Community gymnasium in Morningside Park. Without going into detail, it is important to emphasize that, although some of these criticisms had a partial foundation in fact, most of them rested on misinformation and exaggeration. For this a major share of the responsibility lies not only with the campus and neighborhood press but even more with the media of national significance, which consistently gratified the attention-seeking efforts of tiny but noisy groups in the community without examining their credentials or the validity and legitimacy of their protests. I emphasize this not to indulge in recrimination but to point toward one of the principal inferences that I want shortly to draw.

The significance of these local grievances is that, as the occupation of the buildings continued, they provided to an increasing number of students the real reasons for joining in the disturbances, even though they may have been scarcely conscious and even though at the time few of them surfaced as explicit demands. Thus a result of the delay in calling upon the police, dictated at the beginning by a desire to avoid inflaming the neighboring black community, was that in the end students were in the buildings for all kinds of reasons. With the exception of the black students, they were nevertheless dominated, even manipulated, by the leadership of the extremist group, with whom the real confrontation existed. The basic dilemma we faced was thus either capitulation by the University, which, even if it had been literally possible, would have validated the actions as well as the demands of the extremist group, or the use of force against a large number of students, most of whom were not part of the extremist group and many of whom had little or no respect for it.

Of the many inferences that can be drawn from the experiences at Columbia, I shall restrict myself to those in two different areas, one dealing

with the problem of communication and the other bearing on the role of the faculty.

Communication within the University in the past has depended implicitly on the existence of a community. That is, it has developed from essentially informal processes of association and involvement strong and frequent enough, especially but not exclusively among faculty, so that an essentially accurate version of events and problems in the community is shared among all or almost all of its members. The processes of the community, in turn, rested on norms of assessment and of mutual obligation that placed limits on misperception and facilitated suspension of judgment if not always re. ble understanding.

For reasons that are apparent to anyone who has watched the academic world in the past two decades, these community underpinnings have been radically altered, perhaps destroyed. They will not be restored in anything like the same form. The academy has become more a loose association than a community, and it is thus dependent as never before upon formal devices, including modes of communication.

These changes have occurrred with sufficient rapidity so that, at least at Columbia, these essential formal means of communication had been insufficiently developed. The resulting gap was dominated by the undergraduate press and by the metropolitan media, both of which were dangerously inadequate to the situation.

As on all campuses most of the time, the student press is highly unreliable, frequently irresponsible, and, when controlled by a group that is hostile to the institution, seriously destructive. In the earlier conditions of community, this was little more th[illegible] a nuisance. Faculty and many students were able to discount its repor[illegible]d to correct them through the means subtly but significantly provided by the fact of community. Under contemporary conditions a near monopoly of the campus communications pattern by the student press is dangerous, even a menace.

The metropolitan media, peculiarly significant for a university located in New York, occupy a portion of the institution's internal communications gap. Especially the newspapers, but also the electronic media, are disposed not only to exploit the more sensational incidents occurring at the university but increasingly to deal in what I would call non-news—in part interpretive reporting that may bear a closer relation to the selective perceptions of the journalists than to the facts, and in part a recording of incidents that are of no intrinsic significance and frequently are carefully staged for the purpose of exploiting the attention of the media.

The consequences in a crisis may be grotesque, but the chief significance of this communications situation is in the longer term—in the accumulation

of messages and impressions that contribute to the explosive potential of a disruption.

The answer to this problem obviously does not lie in management or censorship of the student press. Nor does it lie in the establishment of stronger relations with the metropolitan media, though that can be helpful, especially in communicating with the constituency of alumni and others outside the campus. In the altered academic society the need is for formal means of communication that can compete effectively with these unreliable alternatives. Clearly this should be one of the considerations guiding any re-examination of university governance. New modes of faculty and student participation may help significantly to close the communications gap. But they will not be enough. In the contemporary setting, no university administration can be without a regular printed or electronic means of reporting to students and faculty completely under its control and aimed at frank and responsible communication of the facts involved in incidents, developing issues, current problems, and proposed policies. Having such a medium will not prevent crises, but it can help to contain or to restrain them by making it more difficult for a determined minority to exploit an uninformed majority.

Inferences concerning the role of the faculty are more difficult and a good deal more controversial. One cannot disagree with McGeorge Bundy's observation that "when it comes to a crunch, in a first-class university, it is the faculty which decides." What the faculty decides, of course, can be critically important to the health of the institution. What the faculty decides, moreover, depends upon the *means* for faculty decision and even more upon the clarity with which members of the faculty see the issues involved in a confrontation.

At Columbia the means of faculty decision, as I have already suggested, were not well developed. The faculties of the several schools were for the most part capable of and accustomed to making decisions within their separate jurisdictions. But the university-wide mechanisms had never been strong. Those that existed, however, should have been activated. The failure to do so was, in my judgment, the major mistake made by those of us in the administration. Had these mechanisms been used, responsibility for the hard decisions would have been more widely shared. More important, a conspicuous role for such legitimate faculty bodies would have subordinated the self-constituted faculty groups, notably the so-called Ad Hoc Faculty Group, which always spring up in such situations. As it was, by the time that all the faculties on the main campus were assembled—on the fifth full day of the disturbances—in an extra-statutory meeting, the Ad Hoc Faculty Group had *de facto* become the faculty voice. Although the large group on that fifth day passed by an overwhelming margin

(466–40) a vote of confidence in the administration, its voice did not dominate the faculty scene politically.

Even this circumstance would not have been critical if the Ad Hoc Faculty Group had been able to face the fundamental issue and take a stand on it. This was a curious group of mixed and changing composition—a kind of political floating crap game—but it had a continuing steering committee that maintained a precarious position of leadership.

The issues in the Columbia situation were many, but only one was fundamental, namely, whether any segment of the university could be permitted with impunity to achieve its ends by force, whether any institution dedicated to reason and the resolution of differences by reason could, without destroying its own legitimacy, acknowledge the legitimacy of force by a dissenting group. The fundamental issue was, in other words, a question of the means that were being employed.

Our delay in calling in the civil authorities was caused in part by our concern about the effects in the black community, as I have indicated, and by a slim hope that reason might prevail, but it was also motivated by the hope that, in the face of persistent unreason, faculty opinion would take a stand on the fundamental issue and would support the distasteful alternative of using the police. This hope proved to be vain, especially in the case of the majority of those in the vocal Ad Hoc Faculty Group.

Why? What were the motives? One cannot say with certainty because the motives and rationalizations were many and mixed. A small number, not all of them at the junior levels, fully associated themselves with the extremist students and their leaders. Unlike some of the latter, they regarded the apparent issues in the disturbances as the real ones and justified without hesitation the tactics that the students employed. Another small segment, zealous radicals thirty-five years ago, thought they saw at Columbia the revolution that had slipped from them in their youth. Joined by other misty-eyed romantics from the literary lairs of New York, they hailed the false dawn—largely as spectators. Another group, somewhat larger, were suffering from a sense of guilt and were apparently attempting to make up for neglect of their students—in some cases a notorious neglect—by a passionate concern for the demands of the protestors. A great many were more or less unconsciously expressing, through a posture of mediation between the protesters and the administration, their chronic sense of hostility toward the latter. Finally, a considerable number did indeed see the basic issue. Many of these withdrew from the Ad Hoc Faculty Group in disgust. Others stayed patiently through the interminable sessions, but theirs was a minority voice in its councils.

On the fifth full day, the Ad Hoc Faculty Group submitted an ultimatum to the administration and the protestors. If its terms were accepted by the

administration and not by the protestors, the Ad Hoc Faculty Group would withdraw its objections to the use of police. If the reverse, the group would physically resist forced evacuation of the occupied buildings. When the administration went a considerable way toward accepting these hastily drafted terms and the protesters rejected them *in toto,* the issue should have been clear. At that point the Ad Hoc Faculty Group could have taken the position that there was no longer an alternative to police intervention. When they failed to do so, they betrayed their university, and in a more fundamental way they rejected an essential condition of the academic life. Having not faced the basic issue, of course, they were free to denounce the administration for the excesses that accompanied the police action, and they were under no necessity to find principle in their wayward actions.

The Columbia faculty, I should note, has at no time supported the proposition that students participating in the disruptions should not be disciplined. "Amnesty" was a demand from the beginning, but a substantial majority of the faculty has rejected it. One suspects, however, that a much less substantial majority, possibly only a minority, have fully accepted an essential corollary of that anti-amnesty position, namely, that if accountability for violating the norms of the community is to be insisted upon, then it may be necessary to call upon the police, with all that such action may imply, to re-establish the conditions under which such accountability can be determined.

Disruptive disturbances on university campuses, I regretfully assume, will be with us for some time. As they occur, it will be the faculty who will decide. They will determine the basic responses and the patterns of discipline. More fundamentally they will decide whether the only admissible means of change and of resolving differences shall be those that are of the essence of intellectual society—reason and civility—or whether they will tolerate means that are the antithesis of the values that underlie an association of scholars.

Much can and should be done to alter the patterns of governance in our institutions. Creating modes of communication that can compensate for the decline of the community is important. So are many other adjustments and innovations. But whatever the changes that may come about, ultimately our faculties will decide the terms on which the universities will survive as they insist or fail to insist on means of change that are compatible with the essential preconditions of a civil and academic society.